

Philadelphia, PA – On November 9th, two days prior to Veterans' Day, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) shared memories with fellow veterans and delivered an address as the keynote speaker of the Community Interfaith Tribute to Veterans at the Philadelphia Episcopal Church.

— “The men and women who have worn the cloth of our nation have taught us through example about the meaning of courage, sacrifice, and patriotism,” said Congressman Sestak. “It is an honor to share my experiences with other Veterans as well as listen to their reflections and concerns. I thank the Philadelphia Episcopal Church for this opportunity and also for its recognition of our Veterans and their families. It is vital that we continually commemorate their honorable service to our nation. Veterans and their families have endured much on our nation's behalf.”

The ceremony included a recognition of the veterans and their families present as well and a silent tribute to those absent. In closing, it provided a forum for veterans to voice their concerns to a team of trained counselors who, in turn, composed a document to convey those concerns to elected officials and organizations who assist veterans.

Congressman Sestak noted, “In addition to paying tribute to their service, we must also make certain that veterans of this nation are able to have an open dialogue with their government to ensure that we meet their needs. Thousands of troops are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues, and more Veterans of current and past wars are falling into homelessness faster than we have seen in any prior conflicts. It is imperative that we continue to devote as many resources as possible to combating these serious problems.”

During his first term, Congressman Sestak has been hard work to assist our nation's Veterans. In August, Congressman Sestak introduced legislation specifically focused on improving benefits for Veterans in two categories: Priority 7, representing Veterans whose injuries are not service-related and whose income is more than approximately \$28,000, but less than 80 percent of the community's median income; and Priority 8, representing Veterans whose injuries are not service related and whose incomes are higher than Priority 7 Veterans. Since 2000, the number of uninsured Veterans has increased by more than 235,000, to 1.8 million nationwide.

The Congressman has also has been engaged in broader efforts to improve the quality of life for all Veterans. Building on the largest ever increase in VA funding that the Congressman supported a year ago, the Congressman voted for, and the House recently passed, an appropriations bill that provides \$47.7 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs, a \$4.6 billion increase over fiscal year 2008. Of particular significance is the medical services funding, which focuses on two areas of growing concern: mental health and homelessness. This bill appropriates \$3.8 billion for specialty mental health care and \$584 million for substance abuse programs. To address homelessness, this act builds on the Homes for Heroes Act, which the

Congressman supported to establish a supportive housing program at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for low-income veterans.

According to the VA, its homeless assistance and treatment network reaches more than 100,000 veterans annually. However, this number represents only 25 percent of homeless Veterans, leaving 300,000 Veterans who must seek assistance from local government agencies and service organizations in their communities. To further address this serious problem, Congressman Sestak voted for, and the House and Senate passed, the Dignified Treatment of Wounded Warriors Act (HR 1538). This legislation would require the VA to carry out a demonstration program in at least 3 locations on preventing Veterans at-risk of homelessness from becoming homeless.

The Congressman also included two critical amendments to the bill to improve mental health care for wounded soldiers. The first highlights the fact that mental health care is an essential component to the medical services offered to our Veterans and the members of our Armed Services by clarifying that 'medical care' as defined in HR 1538 includes mental health care services. The second amendment requires the Secretary of the Department of Defense to develop a plan to help prevent Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other stress-related psychopathologies (including substance abuse conditions) from developing in our military service members. In addition, it requires the Secretary to submit to Congress within 180 days a plan for establishing a Peer-Reviewed research program within the Defense Health Program's research and development function to research the prevention of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and how to best strengthen the psychological resiliency of our military service members.

"I was truly honored by the opportunity to speak to the greater Philadelphia interfaith community about our nation's Veterans," said Congressman Sestak. "It is a bond that stands the eternal test of time, and finds the grandest sepulcher of all—a home in the hearts of brave men and women." "To me, Veterans Day is an opportunity to reflect on the sacrifices of those who have gone before me, and to redouble my efforts to ensure that Veterans past, present, and future are honored by thought and action for the freedoms they and their families have earned for us all."

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.

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